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DISSIMILATIVE WRITING IN REPUBLICAN LATIN AND VO IN PLAUTUS

BY E. H. STURTEVANT

Several scholars¹ have in recent years shown quite conclusively that in certain important respects Latin orthography did not accurately represent the pronunciation, and they have traced a group of these irrational spellings to the influence of a precept of the schools. During the last century or two of the Republic there was a widespread prejudice against writing *vv* or *ii*, and consequently it was customary to spell *qvom*, *ingenvos*, *servos*, *adicio*, *inferis*² to indicate the pronunciations *quum*, *ingenuus*, *servus*, *adiicio*, *inferiis*.

Niedermann (p. 60) and Anderson (pp. 103 f.) feel that the aversion to *vv* was at least in part due to a desire to avoid ambiguity; but Kent justly remarks (p. 41) that *servvs* and the like are not ambiguous to one who speaks Latin. We may add that *adicio* and *inferis* are much more misleading than if written with *ii*. Then what was the origin of this bit of Roman pedantry? So pointless a theory could scarcely grow up except as an attempt to explain some previously existing anomaly, although when once adopted the theory may well have tended to perpetuate the anomaly. We may safely assume that the facts which we have before us—or some of them, at least—are older than the theory by which the Romans accounted for them. Lindsay, Niedermann, and Kent are quite right in thinking that pedantry was wholly responsible for the persistence in the last years of the Republic of such spellings as *qvom* for *cum*, *servos* for *servus*, *adicio* for *adiicio*, etc., but they must be wrong in supposing that the Romans chose so perverse a system of orthography for its own sake.

As far as origins are concerned, we are driven back upon the older explanation; the spellings with *vo* and with a single *i* were phonetic

¹ Lindsay, *Latin Language*, pp. 227, 271; Niedermann, *Mélanges de linguistique offerts à Saussure*, pp. 58–65; Mather, *Harvard Studies*, VI, 83–151; Anderson, *TAPA*, XL, 99–105; Kent, *TAPA*, XLIII, 35–56.

² In this paper small capitals are used to indicate spelling, while italics indicate that the pronunciation of quoted words is chiefly thought of.

to start with, although, as we have just seen, they continued in use after they had ceased to represent pronunciation. In some cases there is no doubt that a pronunciation once existed which would normally be represented by the spellings we have called anomalous. Thus compounds of *iacio* have an initial short syllable in the early dramatists (e.g., *ādiceret*, Plautus *Poen.* 1174), and consequently the spelling ADICIO was at that time phonetically correct. When *i* had been reintroduced from *ieci*, *iactus*, etc., the old spelling was retained for the new *adiicio*, and now the pedantic theory about II was called in to explain the anomaly. Similarly POMPEI originally stood for *Pompēi* and *Pompēi* (both from *Pompēi*), and when the analogy of *Pompēi*, etc., restored *ii*, the shorter spelling was retained to represent *Pompēi*. *Inferi*s regularly became *inferi*s about 150 B.C., and led to the spelling INFERIS, which was presently employed for the analogically restored *inferi*s. So, too, such spellings as SOCIETIS at first accurately represented the pronunciation, but when the phonetic distinction between *ei* and *i* broke down they required explanation, and so helped to suggest the rule that the letter I could not follow itself.

Kent understands ADIESE, ADIESET, and ADIESENT in the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* as dissimilative writings for *adiisse*, etc. But this view is uncalled for if we accept Brugmann's identification¹ of Latin *ii* (perfect of *eo*) with Sanskrit *iy-āya*, *iy-ētha*, a perfect with "Attic" reduplication. Latin shows the diphthong, which should appear in the strong forms, in *red-iei*t (*CIL*, I, 541), *inter-ieisti* (*CIL*, I, 1202), *ad-iese* (i.e., *iē* from *iei*), and *sub-iūt*, etc., in the poets, while *īero* (Plautus *Capt.* 194), *īerant* (Terence *Ad.* 27), etc., and Umbrian *iust* preserve the *ī* (from *ī-ī-* of the weak forms) which appears in Sanskrit *īy-uṣ*, *īy-āthuṣ*.

If Kent is right (p. 47) in interpreting ABIEGNIEIS, AESCVLNIEIS (*CIL*, I, 577) as *abiegnēis*, *aesculnēis*, the pedantic aversion to double vowel signs must here have operated as an impelling cause, and it may indeed have done so at any time after it gained acceptance as an explanation of other phenomena. It is, however, still possible to interpret these words as *abiegnīs* and *aesculnīs*, as I formerly did.²

¹ *Grundriss*², II (1913), No. 3, pp. 34 f.

² *Contraction in the Case-Forms of the Latin "io-" and "ia-" Stems and of "deus," "is," and "idem,"* p. 35.

It is certain that the spellings QVOM, INGENVOS, and SERVOS once represented the pronunciation; but here there is a difficulty. If, as Anderson seems to think (p. 105), *servos* became *servus* at the time **dolos* became *dolus*, we have no explanation of the survival of the old spelling SERVOS beside the newer DOLVS; as we have already seen, the pedantic aversion to doubling a vowel sign cannot be the cause of the phenomena which that theory was invented to explain. It is, then, extremely probable that the pronunciation *servos* persisted after **dolos* had become *dolus*. This phonetic difference may have lasted only a short time; once a distinction in spelling has established itself it tends to persist after all reason for it has vanished—as witness a hundred anomalies in the traditional English orthography. It is possible, therefore, that SERVOS was pronounced *servus* even as early as Plautus' time; whether it actually was so pronounced or not is a question that will claim our attention later. At present we are merely contending that the pronunciation *servus* was of somewhat later origin than the pronunciation *dolus*.

The same reasoning goes to show that the change of *voltis* to *vultis* must have been somewhat later than the change of **moltus* to *multus*. That this actually was the history of the sounds we have fairly conclusive evidence. Anderson (pp. 102 f.) holds that no *ō* before *l* became *ū* until after Plautus, but the evidence he cites scarcely justifies so wide a generalization. His argument is based upon the following: (1) CONSOLVERVNT, COSOLERETVR, TABOLAM, OQVOLTOD in the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 B.C., (2) MOLTARE in *Eph. Ep.*, II, 298, and MOLTAI in *CIL*, XI, 4766, (3) CO(N)SOL in various early inscriptions, and (4) four passages in early authors where assonance makes the pronunciation *vol* for the later *vul* seem probable, e.g., Plautus *Amph.* 114, *volt voluptatem*. The evidence of the fourth group concerns the words *voltis*, *volt*, and *volta* (= *voltūs*), and it is therefore quite in harmony with the current opinion that the early Latin orthography *vo* was phonetic. Although evidence from puns and plays on words must be used with great caution, we may grant that Anderson has given us a valid reason for pronouncing early Latin *vol*+consonant as we have been accustomed to do.

His first three groups of evidence, however, can scarcely stand against the great host of words with *ul* from earlier *ol* which occur in our manuscripts of Plautus and Terence in the same form as in classical Latin. Such words are *multus*, *culpa*, *consultus*, *pulvis*, *fabula*, *stabulum*, *vestibulum*, *tetuli*, *postulo*, and others far too numerous to name. It is granted that one form on a stone is more valuable than many forms in manuscripts, since the orthography of the dramatists may have been largely modernized; but it is after all scarcely credible that so far-reaching an alteration as this should have been made in Plautus' spelling without leaving some traces of the original state of affairs.

We must, therefore, inquire whether Anderson's epigraphic instances of *OL* may not be archaistic spellings of *ul*. In the first place, it is well known that the legal phraseology of the Romans was in general very conservative, and furthermore that the laws of the Twelve Tables were so thoroughly learned by every schoolboy that they had a powerful influence upon the development of the Latin language. We cannot, then, lay much stress upon the archaic spelling of a legal word like *molto* or *molta*, or of a publicist's word like *co(n)sol*. There remain the four forms in the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*, a document which is known to contain archaisms (e.g., the ablative -*d*). Some of the forms themselves are rather suspicious: the phonetic interpretation of *OQVOLTOD* is too uncertain to serve as the basis of an argument; the verb *consulo* was popularly connected with *consul* (Varro *LL*. 5. 80: "consul nominatus qui consuleret populum et senatum, nisi illinc potius unde Accius ait in Bruto 'qui recte consulat, consul ciat'"), and therefore *OL* in *CONSOLVERVNT* and *COSOLERETVR* may be due to the traditional spelling *co(N)SOL* (note the omission of *N* in the second word).

As far as *ol*+consonant is concerned, we have in Plautus' *sultis* for *si voltis* indubitable proof that the change to *ul* (except after *v*) was earlier than that author's day. Since *v* is lost only between like vowels, *sultis* must be due to the analogical proportion, *vis:sis*=*voltis:x*,¹ which could yield nothing but **soltis*. This **soltis* changed before Plautus' time to *sultis*, which occurs with this spelling in the

¹ Cf. Lindsay, *The Captivi of Plautus*, p. 230.

Ambrosian manuscript in *Stich.* 65, and many times in the other manuscripts, and whose *u* is guaranteed by such *vv. ll.* as *stultis* (BCD) in *Rudens* 820. In this word a modernizing of Plautus' spelling is out of the question, since *sultis* is not quotable from any later author. The contrast in pronunciation between *voltis* and *multus*, which we found ourselves bound on theoretic grounds to assume for some early period, is shown by *sultis* to have belonged to the period of Plautus. That *voltis* was still pronounced with an *o* in Caecilius' time is Anderson's inference from *Aethrio* 5 (cited by Diomed. 1. 386 K.): "Actutum, *voltis*, *empta* est; *noltis*, non *empta* est."

Anderson argues that before Plautus' time *uo* and *vo* became *uu* and *vu* in all circumstances under which Imperial Latin shows the change, excepting only in the position before *l*. Although Kent (p. 41) accepts the conclusion, the present writer is still unconvinced. The first argument is this: "It seems certain . . . , in view . . . of the fact that vowel weakening normally came later in accented than in unaccented syllables, that *servos* began to be pronounced *servus* at a considerable interval before *volnus* began to be pronounced *vulnus*." We may admit the validity of the reasoning, merely substituting the word "likely" for the word "certain," but as long as we do not know when *volnus* became *vulnus* such a consideration can scarcely be said to "establish" *servus* in the plays of Plautus. The only other evidence adduced that applies to words of the type of *servos* is the spelling FLAVS in *CIL*, I, 277 (an early coin inscription), which Anderson interprets as *Flavus*.² It seems more likely that it is a phonetic spelling of the form which regularly developed from *Flavos*.³ *Flaus* then stands in the same relation to *Flavus* as *deus* to *divus*, *oleum* to *olivum*, and *Gnaeus* to *naevus*.

The words with *quo > cu* form a special class, since they exhibit two changes which may or may not have taken place at the same time. The confusion between the preposition *cum* and the conjunc-

¹ Kent, *loc. cit.*

² Anderson's citation of Ritschl's theory (*Opusc.*, IV, 488) about this form is incorrect, but, as Ritschl's discussion of the matter is now antiquated, we need not consider it here.

³ See Solmsen, *Studien zur lateinischen Lautgeschichte*, pp. 37 f.; cf. Sommer, *Handbuch*², p. 162.

tion, which is proved by the use of *qvom*¹ for the preposition in *CIL*, I, 34 (about 150 B.C.), shows that the conjunction had come to be pronounced *cum* shortly after Terence's death. Although it is possible that the influence of *tum* made *quom* become *cum* before *equom* became *ecum*, it is probably safer in the absence of further evidence to assume that all words with unaccented *quo* suffered the change at about this time. Anderson's argument that since *u* after *q* was a weak sound it could not have prevented *equos* from becoming *equus* at the time **dolos* became *dolus* is not convincing. There seems to be no cogent reason for doubting the phonetic character of the Plautine and Terentian spellings *qvom*, *eqvos*, etc.

The conclusions which Kent draws from his own paper and those of Mather and Anderson (Kent, pp. 55 f.) require one modification. The use of *i* for *ii* and *iii* and the use of *vo* for *uu* and *vu* was due in each case to the retention of an old orthography to denote a changed pronunciation. The resulting anomalies were explained in the schools as due to the impropriety of doubling vowel signs,² and the satisfaction given by this explanation perpetuated for varying lengths of time some of the unphonetic spellings.

Anderson's conclusions need revision in two points. His attack upon the traditional interpretation of *vo* in Plautus is not successful, and he is wrong in dating after Plautus the weakening of *ol* (except when *v* precedes) to *ul*. On the other hand, he supplies a useful prop for the current theory in regard to the pronunciation of *voltis*, etc., in Plautus. He shows that the change of unaccented *quo* to *cu* took place about 150 B.C., a hundred years earlier than had been supposed, and he makes it probable that the spelling *vo* for imperial *vv* was no longer phonetic in Cicero's time.

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¹ A less satisfactory explanation of this form is suggested by Sommer, *Handbuch*², p. 158.

² Was this explanation due to the same grammarians who rejected Accius' plan for denoting vowel length by doubling?